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SUBSCRIPTION
OF THE
CONFESSION OF FAITH
Of the CHURCH OF SCOTLAND,
CONSISTENT WITH LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE;

OR,
AN ATTEMPT
TO VINDICATE IT FROM
The MISREPRESENTATIONS of Those
who maintain the contrary.

BY
DAVID LAMONT, D.D. *K.*
MINISTER OF KIRKPATRICK-DURHAM,
AND
ONE OF THE CHAPLAINS TO HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE
PRINCE OF WALES.

*Remove not the ancient Land-mark which thy Fathers
have set.*

PROVERBS xxii. 28.

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CONFESSIO OF FAITH

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P R E F A C E.

THE Holy Scriptures have often, on one hand, been unjustly attacked by the ignorance, or the arrogance, of Infidels and Scoffers ----and, on the other hand, they have often been feebly defended, by the injudicious expositions of narrow-minded, or enthusiastic interpreters. Their native beauty and simplicity have thus been unhappily defaced, and bigotry and superstition have been introduced into the Church.

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The Confession of Faith of the Church of Scotland has frequently shared the same fate. It has been unjustly attacked by many, who, it is believed, have scarcely been at the trouble of reading it ----and it has been feebly defended by many, who, with a rigid and contracted spirit, have confined their speculations to particular doctrines, instead of taking a liberal and enlarged view of it, as a complete, though compendious system.

The design of the following Treatise, therefore, is not to consider or to explain the particular doctrines of the Confession of Faith

P R E F A C E

Faith----but to view it as a system
----to show, that in whatever light
some of its doctrines may appear
to some particular classes of its
readers, yet that, taken as a sy-
stem, it must be regarded by every
intelligent and impartial mind as
exhibiting the most liberal and
laudable sentiments.

Though I presume not that
any observations of mine will en-
tirely solve every difficulty which
may occur upon this subject; and
though I mean not dogmatically
to assert, that the principles which
I lay down are free from every
mixture of ignorance or error----
yet I am hopeful that some hints
may

may be suggested, which, improved by men of more genius, learning and experience, may be productive of happy effects: At any rate, no circumstance shall deprive me of the satisfaction which I feel in expressing, publicly and sincerely, my good wishes to my brethren, and in exerting my best labours to promote liberality and enlargement of spirit in the Church of which I am proud to be a member.

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THE present age is an age of enquiry. Arts and sciences have attained a high degree of perfection; and liberality of sentiment, not only in philosophy, but also in religion, diffuses its happy influence over the various departments of society.

The obscurity of Heathen ignorance is banished by the illuminating beams of Christian knowledge; and the absurdities of superstition give place to the prevailing power of rational religion. In the present age, one man does not see with another man's eyes, or judge with another man's understanding; but exerts his own faculties with an unfettered freedom, and examines the foundation of every doc-

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trine, before he assumes it as a principle of faith.

It is, at this day, the glory and the happiness of this country, that its inhabitants are emerged from that deep abyss of darkness which involves the Heathen, and the idolater—and that they are guided in their researches after truth by the sacred rays of Reason, and of Revelation. In this kingdom the temple of Paganism is not seen—the altar of superstition is not erected—and the sacrifices of idolatry are not offered up to appease the wrath of artificial and fictitious Divinities. Our enlightened countrymen, advanced above the level of the ancient Barbarians who dwelt in this land, do not worship stocks or stones—deified heroes or the host of heaven—or, like the ignorant and deluded Athenians, bow themselves down before the altar of an “unknown God:” But, taught by their religion that “God is a Spirit,”

Spirit," they study to "worship him in spirit and in truth."—Taught by their religion that the God whom they worship is absolutely, immutably, and eternally perfect, they aspire after the resemblance of his sublime perfections, by cherishing sentiments of uprightness, and by displaying the practice of virtue.

It is the glory and the happiness of this country, that the increasing power of the Reformation hath broken in pieces the galling yoke of ecclesiastical tyranny, and erected the trophies of Christian liberty over the insidious wiles of political priestcraft, and sacerdotal usurpation. Those execrable ages are now no more, in which impossibilities were regarded as objects of faith—cruelties were canonized as virtues—and absurdities were dignified with the title of mysteries—in which the inquisitor, the spiritual merchant, and the tyrant over conscience, watched for the moment

when, to the best advantage, they might persecute the heretic, make a traffic of godliness, and bind the understandings of men in the inglorious chains of oppression and slavery.

The gospel of Christ, now stripped of those magnificent incumbrances with which it was oppressed, and of all those corruptions superinduced upon it by the ignorance or ambition of mankind, is in a great measure restored to its original simplicity ;—and it should be the pride of every Protestant to pull off any irrational, ridiculous, or mystical appendages which, notwithstanding the improvements of modern times, may still hang upon it—and, in the lustre of its unveiled beauty, to show its happy connexion with the genuine dictates of the human understanding, and with the purest feelings of the human heart.

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In an age distinguished, as the present is, for science and for liberty, it is presumed, that an address to the reason of mankind upon a subject of great importance to our National Church, will not be unacceptable to the candid, or be regarded as uninteresting to the serious. And however much the reader may have cause to lament the weakness with which the attempt is executed—yet it is hoped, he will find, in the goodness of the intention, a sufficient apology for the publication.

The subject of this Essay, is the Confession of Faith of the Church of Scotland, considered as a public and national system—and the manner in which Ministers, Elders, Preachers, Professors, and Schoolmasters, connected with the Establishment, are supposed to subscribe it.

The Confession of Faith was compiled in London by the Westminster Divines,
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and by Commissioners from the Church of Scotland; and in the year 1647 received the sanction of the General Assembly, and was appointed to be the Public Standard, or Confession, of the National Church: Hence it may be considered as the basis of our Ecclesiastical Constitution. It was ratified by many acts of the Scotch Parliament prior to the Union betwixt Scotland and England, and was declared to be unalterable by the preliminary article of the Union between these two kingdoms: Hence it may, in some degree, be considered as the basis of our Civil Constitution.

Should it, therefore, for argument's sake, be for a moment supposed, that, through the ignorance or fallibility of our forefathers, any error or defect, in doctrine, or in duty, had crept into the National Confession, it would seem next to impossible that such error or defect, if
any

any such there be, can ever be corrected : because it does not occur how any such error or defect could be corrected, without plucking up by the roots our whole establishment both in Church and State—and the probable consequences of any innovation on the national system, would be dangerous, rather than salutary. Besides, were an alteration on the doctrines or duties contained in the Confession of Faith proposed, it is not probable that, in a period of liberal investigation and free enquiry, any set of doctrines could be framed which would take in the various opinions of all individuals :—So that, were a new Confession of Faith to be constructed, it is probable, that as many objections, difficulties and scruples might exist with respect to it, as now exist with respect to the present. Thus it is reasonable to conclude, that the Church of Scotland, tempering the heat of zeal with the

the coolness of prudence, and anxious to guard against the dangers of an innovating spirit, will retain its present Confession as long as it retains its present establishment—and will, with the poet, rather choose “to bear the ills it has, than fly to others that it knows not of.”

The Confession of Faith of the Church of Scotland consists of thirty-three chapters—which chapters contain not only the general doctrines of the Church, but also the particular passages of Scripture which are used to prove the truth of these doctrines.

Some of the doctrines contained in these thirty-three chapters—such as, the existence and attributes of God, and the divine original of the Holy Scriptures, &c. it is believed, are agreed to, not only by all Protestants, but even by all Christians. Some of the doctrines contained in these thirty-three chapters—such as, predestination

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tion and infant baptism, &c. have been sources of controversy and speculative debate, not only among Christians, but even among Protestants.

It is not, however, my design in this treatise, on one hand, to defend the Confession of Faith as a system of faith and practice absolutely perfect and infallible: This might, perhaps, be regarded as presumption, or as the effect of a high-flying zeal for the tenets of a society of which I am a member. Nor is it my design, on the other hand, to attack the Confession of Faith, or any of its doctrines, as a departure from the simplicity of truth, or an unfair interpretation of the Holy Scriptures: This might be considered as an act of inconsistency and high impropriety, in one who has himself subscribed it. But my design is, as I have already hinted, without speculating on particular doctrines, to take an impartial view of the

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Confession of Faith as a general system—and to consider how far persons, differing in some degree from one another in opinion, with regard to some of the articles of the Confession of Faith, or at least with regard to the interpretation of these articles, may, with a good conscience, and without the charge of inconsistency, subscribe it: and if, in the illustrations, which with becoming deference, I submit to the Public, I shall be so happy as to enlarge the sentiments, or quiet the scruples of any honest individual enquiring after truth, I shall rejoice in my success, and regard my feeble labours as amply compensated.

In the discussion of the subject, I will confine my reasoning to the two following points. In the *first* place, I will endeavour to prove, that every man, without exception, who, by the good providence of God, lives in a free country

and is a member of a Protestant Church, possesses and enjoys, and, upon the principles of the religion he professes, is entitled to possess and enjoy, the rights of private judgment, and the most complete and perfect freedom to examine for himself the doctrines of religion, and the evidences upon which they are founded—to form his own creed—and to worship God according to the light of his own conscience, and the unpoluted instructions of the Holy Scriptures: And if I establish this proposition, to the satisfaction and conviction of human reason—then the inference which I will draw from it is—That the subscription of any confession of faith whatever, in any Protestant Church, can never be imagined to subvert this essential freedom—but must always be supposed to imply the most unrestrained exercise of the rational faculties, and the most enlarged right of private judgment.

In the *second* place, I will endeavour to prove, that the Confession of Faith of the Church of Scotland, when fully understood, and fairly interpreted, does not tend in the least degree, to destroy freedom of enquiry, or to chain down the human understanding to a belief of its doctrines any farther than as they appear to the mind of the intelligent and honest enquirer to be founded upon the unbiaſſed dictates of reason, and the ſacred declarations of the word of GOD: And if I eſta- bliſh this propoſition to the ſatisfaction and conviction of human reaſon—then the inference which I will draw from it is—That, though the ſubſcriber of this Confession ſhould not be altogether free from ſome apprehenſions that ſome of its doctrines or interpretations are dark or diſputable—or, at leaſt, that ſome of the Scripture proofs are ſtrained or inappli- cable; yet if, in general, he is well affect-

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ed to the constitution, discipline, and worship of the Church of Scotland, he is not chargeable with inconsistency in subscribing it—because such subscription seems to be warranted by the Confession of Faith itself.

The first proposition which I will endeavour to prove, is—That every man, without exception, who, by the good providence of God, lives in a free country, and is a member of a Protestant Church, possesses and enjoys, and, upon the principles of the religion he professes, is entitled to possess and enjoy, the rights of private judgment, and the most complete and perfect freedom to examine for himself the doctrines of religion, and the evidences upon which they are founded—to form his own creed—and to worship God according to the light of his own conscience, and the unpolluted instructions of the Holy Scriptures. Every member

member of the Church of Scotland derives the right of private judgment, and the unrestrained freedom of examining for himself the principles of religion, from these four sources—the Law of Nature—the Religion of CHRIST—the Reformation—and the Confession of Faith. The first he enjoys as a man—the second as a Christian—the third as a Protestant—and the fourth as a Presbyterian.

In the *first* place—Liberty of conscience, and the rights of private judgment, are founded upon the Law of Nature. That man is a rational being, is a proposition which will not be denied. That reason was given to man for important purposes, is a proposition equally undeniable. For, it is not to be imagined, that the wise Author of our being would have implanted such a noble and glorious talent in the soul, merely for the purpose
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of assisting us to eat, and drink, and sleep, and indulge the propensities of animal nature—as, it is probable, that sensual delights have the strongest relish, where rational reflections have the feeblest influence. It is, therefore, plain, that this divine faculty was lodged in the soul for the attainment of pleasures more pure and permanent than those which ly within the province of the senses.

One of the chief and most illustrious attributes of Reason, is the power of distinguishing right from wrong, truth from error, and solid argument from sophistry or conjecture. Now, it is absolutely impossible that any man can, accurately, and impartially, make these distinctions, unless he be permitted, without restraint, and without controul, to examine, to compare, to deliberate, to reflect, and in one word to exercise his mental, moral, and reasoning powers. Hence it is evident,

dent, that every being, capable of moral and religious obligations, must have, from the law of Nature, an original and unalienable right to choose his own religion—to form his own creed—and to worship God according to the convictions of his own mind. Fetter this right, and you destroy it—Destroy this right, and you annihilate religion. For if once freedom of enquiry, from which religion arises, and only can arise, is destroyed—it is obvious, religion, which flows from the exercise of that freedom, cannot exist.

Chance may throw a man into a country where good principles are established by law—but, if he blindly and implicitly adopts the national creed, merely because it is the religious system of the country where he lives, without seriously and diligently examining the nature and import of its principles, and of its proofs, this can never be imputed as religion to him—

him—because his belief of one system of doctrines, rather than another, arises merely from the ideas of the country in which Providence has fixed his lot—and that, in common sense, can never be regarded as religion, upon the principles of which a man would be a Mahometan in Turkey—a Heathen in Japan—a Roman Catholic in Portugal—and a Protestant in Britain. Such principles may indeed answer all the purposes of a fashionable profession, or promote the continuance of an established superstition—but they can never give comfort to the mind in the periods of rational reflection, or inspire it with dignity and hope in the serious prospect of a future judgment.

The tyrant's arm, and the ruffian's sword, may frighten cowardly and timorous spirits into a base and inglorious compliance with external ceremonies—But whilst the understanding is uncon-

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vinced, and the heart is unaffected, no more of religion can exist than its painted and passing form. Outward force may make a man a hypocrite—but outward force can never make a man religious. Force may prompt us to display the specious and glittering outworks of religion—but force can never cause the vital influence of religion to penetrate the heart. Hence it is evident, that though compulsion, by an awful display of its terrors, may subdue the trembling spirit of the coward, or bend to its purpose the accommodating soul of the hypocrite—yet it cannot overthrow the eternal distinction between error and truth, or prevail upon the candid breast to embrace a system which the understanding and the feelings reject.

Thus it appears, that, by the law of nature, there exists in every man, an original right to fix his own religion, and to
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form his own creed: And, if it be admitted, that this right is originally inherent in every man; then it must be farther admitted, that the person possessing this right, having derived it immediately and responsibly from GOD, can, upon no pretence whatever, renounce it;—nor can any human authority, without a gross invasion of human liberty, and a most oppressive act of arbitrary power, deprive him of it. Our civil rights we may, in certain situations, resign, or submit to the judgment and arbitration of others; our connexion with society in this life, the frailty of human laws, and the necessity of circumstances, may justify such conduct:—but our mental and moral rights we are not at liberty to surrender. In the affairs which belong to eternity, every man stands upon his own feet, and, at the day of judgment, must answer for both his creed and his conduct. Therefore, as

it is certain that every man must answer for himself, it is certain that every man must judge for himself; since no proposition can be conceived to be more absurd than this, that another man should choose a religion for me, and yet that I should be answerable for his choice.

In the *second* place, Liberty of conscience, and the rights of private judgment, are founded upon the religion of Christ. All the doctrines, duties, precepts, parables, institutions, and exhortations proposed to mankind by Jesus Christ, are evidently addressed to them as a race of beings invested with power, and with liberty to deliberate upon the nature and tendency of the doctrines which he taught, and to decide upon the import and validity of the proofs by which he supported their truth or credibility: And, if mankind have not freedom to examine the
system

system of the Gospel, and power to judge of its doctrines, duties, and evidences, it may, with as much propriety and edification, be preached, after the example of Saint Francis, to birds, or to fishes, as to men.

This general proposition, That the Gospel was addressed by its Founder to mankind, as a species of beings possessed of reason and liberty, is manifest, not only from the principles of fair deduction, but also from a variety of explicit and particular passages in the New Testament; a few of which, for the satisfaction of the liberal enquirer, I beg leave to quote.—In the Gospel by John, fifth chapter and 39th verse, Jesus Christ, admonishing the Jews, useth these words: “Search the Scriptures.” Now, an admonition to search the Scriptures, evidently presupposes liberty and power in the searcher to examine the nature, tendency,

dency, and evidences of the Scriptures; to adopt them, if, upon a free and impartial enquiry, they appear to be founded on the attributes and authority of God; or to reject them, if they appear to be “a cunningly devised fable,” or the artful fabrication of an unprincipled impostor: And if mankind possess not these powers of examination and decision, it is clear as the light of the sun, that an exhortation to them to search the Scriptures, would not only be absurd, but even ungenerous.

In the Gospel by Matthew, ch. xxiii. and verses 8th, 9th, and 10th, Christ, speaking to the multitude and to his disciples, useth these words: “And be not
“ye called Rabbi; for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren: And call no man your father
“upon the earth; for one is your father, which is in heaven: Neither be ye
“called

“ called masters ; for one is your master,
 “ even Christ.” The obvious meaning
 of this passage is, that, as “ the kingdom
 “ of Christ is not of this world,” and as
 his religion does not concern itself with
 the fluctuating maxims of civil govern-
 ment, or the perishing distinctions of po-
 litical ambition, but confines itself wholly
 to the administrations and police of the
 moral and religious world, the Christian,
 in all matters purely religious and spiri-
 tual, has no master but Christ ;—that he
 is bound to reject the impositions of hu-
 man authority, whether civil or ecclesiastical,
 so far as these impositions swerve
 from the simplicity, or contradict the
 truth of the Gospel ;—and that whenever
 a competition occurs betwixt the original
 doctrines of the Gospel, and the super-
 added doctrines of human explication,
 the follower of Christ is to reject the ex-
 plication, and to adhere to the Gospel ;
 upon

upon this undoubted principle, that
 “ God is to be obeyed, rather than
 “ man.”

In the Gospel by John, chap. x. and
 verses 37th and 38th, Christ makes this
 address to the Jews: “ If I do not the
 “ works of my Father, believe me not;
 “ but if I do, though ye believe not me,
 “ believe the works, that ye may know
 “ and believe that the Father is in me,
 “ and I in him.” This address obviously
 implies a most unrestrained freedom in
 every spectator, to consider, with all the
 powers of human reason, the nature and
 tendency of the miracles which Jesus
 wrought; to compare them with the ex-
 ertions of human genius, and with the
 ordinary operations of Divine Providence;
 and, upon the whole, to determine whe-
 ther they glared with the prominent fea-
 tures of imposture and fallacy, or afford-
 ed satisfactory credentials of a Divine
 commission.

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In the Acts of the Apostles, chap. xvii. verse 19th, Paul asserts that "the Bereans were more noble than those in Thessalonica."—And the reason which he assigns as the foundation of their superior excellence is—that they would not take their religion upon trust, or have it imposed upon them by an arbitrary authority—but that, shaking off every fetter which cramps the operations of human reason, and remote from the stupidity of a blind and implicit faith, they searched the scriptures with a free and impartial spirit, in order that they might discover whether the doctrines they contained, and the precepts they enjoined were suited to the perfections, and providence of God, and to the rational conceptions of the human mind—and whether the proofs by which they were corroborated were sufficient evidences of their divine original.

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In the first epistle addressed to the Thessalonians, Paul exhorts every Christian, without exception, to “prove all things;” and to hold fast that which is good.” And John, in his first epistle, chapter 4th and verse 1st, gives Christians an exhortation of the same nature—“Beloved, “believe not every spirit—but try the spirits, whether they are of God—because “many false prophets are gone out into the “world.” The unequivocal sense of these passages is—that there is a power in human nature to distinguish truth from error, religion from superstition, and the simple and sublime doctrines of divine revelation from the spurious and counterfeited doctrines of human imposture—and that, as there is in human nature a power to make these distinctions, so there is in it a most complete and perfect liberty to exercise this power—to deliberate upon every proposition in religion—to examine

amine every proof which is brought forward to attest it—and to form such an opinion, and such a faith as naturally arises to the upright and enquiring mind, from a fair and full exertion of human reason and human liberty. Hence it is plain, that though prudence will teach every wise and considerate man to avail himself of every assistance which he can derive from human systems, commentaries and expositions; yet truth will convince him, that upon every subject of religion and conscience, every man without exception is, under God, his own ultimate and final judge.

In the *third* place—Liberty of conscience, and the rights of private judgment are founded upon the principles of the Reformation. However clearly and incontrovertibly the powers of reason, liberty of conscience, and the rights of pri-

vate judgment are ascertained in the law of nature, and in the religion of Christ—yet such is the situation, and such are the infirmities of human nature in the present life, that these essential and most important rights have not been uniformly, and regularly enjoyed. Mahomet denied the liberty of a free investigation, and the rights of private judgment to the inhabitants of Arabia, and to the inhabitants of all those Eastern countries which he conquered by the sword; and compelled them, on the peril of their lives, to embrace those doctrines which his avarice, or his ambition, prompted him to impose on the cowardice, or credulity of the vanquished. The Church of Rome, with the same spirit, denied to the members of that church the rights of a fair examination, and all the sacred blessings of religious liberty; locked up the scriptures in an unknown tongue; with a high
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exercise of arbitrary power, pressed its doctrines and its dogmas upon its adherents, without allowing them the privilege of judging for themselves; and threatened to inflict the severest, and most terrifying punishments upon any man who should have the presumption to arraign the conduct of the Church, or to depart, in any degree, from the belief of her infallible standards. The consequence of these unjust and arbitrary restraints was this—the light of knowledge and of truth soon disappeared; and the gloom of darkness and of ignorance pervaded the Christian world—the simplicity and the purity of religion were banished from the temple and the altar; and the grossness and absurdities of superstition were introduced to supply their place—Liberty, with all its glories and its blessings, was extinguished, and conscience was chained in the detestable shackles of oppression and tyranny,

tyranny. This darkness prevailed in the Christian church, if Christian church it may be called, till the happy and auspicious era of the Reformation—when, by the heroism of our ancestors, under the blessing of Almighty God, the spirit of religious liberty, which had long been lulled asleep upon the couch of delusive ignorance, happily awoke; and restored to Protestants the sacred privileges of the kingdom of Christ.

The grand and leading principle of the reformation, as every Protestant knows, was this—that every man, without exception, has a right to the free use of the holy scriptures—to examine their doctrines, precepts, institutions, and evidences—to interpret every passage of scripture for himself—and to form his own religious creed, not as he shall be directed by human systems, or enjoined by human laws, but according to those opinions which, in
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the sight of God and a good conscience, after a fair and full examination, he is led to form of the religion of Christ—of the religion of Christ, not as it may be mangled by the assassins of truth, or corrupted by the slaves of superstition, but as it is presented to the human mind, in its native beauty and simplicity, in the Holy Scriptures.

In the *fourth* place—Liberty of conscience, and the rights of private judgment, are founded upon the Confession of Faith of the Church of Scotland. The members of the Church of Scotland, considered as the members of a Protestant Church, have, without question, a most perfect right to all the privileges and immunities which Protestants derive from the Reformation. But this is not all.—Liberty of conscience, freedom of enquiry, and the most unrestrained exercise of the
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rational and moral faculties of the human mind, are clearly defined, and legally secured to them by the public standards of the National Church. For the proof of this proposition, I appeal to the Confession of Faith. In chapter 20th, section 2d, we find the following passage—a passage which, as it discovers the most perfect liberality of sentiment, the most entire consciousness of the limited and fallible powers of the human understanding, and the most sacred respect to the omniscience and supreme authority of God, reflects, and ever will reflect, the highest honour on its authors. The passage is this :—“ God alone is Lord of the
 “ conscience, and hath left it free from the
 “ doctrines and commandments of men,
 “ which are in any thing contrary to his
 “ word, or beside it, in matters of faith or
 “ worship—So that to believe such doc-
 “ trines, or to obey such commands out of
 “ conscience,

“ conscience, is to betray true liberty of
 “ conscience—and the requiring an impli-
 “ cit faith, and an absolute and blind obe-
 “ dience, is to destroy liberty of conscience,
 “ and reason also.”

By the first clause of this article it is evident, that the members of the Church of Scotland have a most entire liberty of conscience, a most complete freedom of enquiry, and a most unlimited right to read, to examine, and to interpret the Scriptures for themselves—for “ GOD alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship.” By the last clause of this article it is evident, that an attempt, by any human authority whatever, whether civil or ecclesiastical, to impose upon any Christian any doctrine or doctrines whatever, which are

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either contrary to Scripture, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship, is a direct invasion of religious liberty, and an act of despotical oppression over conscience—for “ the requiring of an implicit faith “ in such doctrines, and an absolute and “ blind obedience to such commands, is to “ destroy liberty of conscience, and reason “ also.”

Thus have I endeavoured to show, upon what grounds liberty of conscience, and the rights of private judgment, are founded. I have endeavoured to show, that they are founded to all men upon the law of nature ; to all Christians upon the religion of Christ ; to all Protestants upon the principles of the Reformation ; and to all Presbyterians—or at least to all the members of the Church of Scotland, upon the Confession of Faith ;—and if the principles which I have laid down, and endeavoured to illustrate, be admitted,

as I am confident no Protestant will deny, then the conclusion which I propose to draw from them will, I should hope, be equally clear and undeniable—which is—That if liberty of conscience, and the rights of private judgment, are founded upon the law of nature, and the religion of Christ, then the subscriber of any religious system composed by men, in a Protestant country, and in a Protestant Church, cannot, by that subscription, be understood, upon any principle allied to common sense, to resign his liberty of conscience, or his rights of private judgment—but, by a fair and just interpretation, must be understood to retain the most free and unmutilated possession of all those powers and privileges which he derives from the united laws of reason and of Christianity.

The *second* proposition which I will endeavour to prove, is—That the Confession of Faith of the Church of Scotland, when fully understood and fairly interpreted, does not tend, in the least degree, to destroy freedom of enquiry, or to chain down the human understanding to a belief of its doctrines, any farther than as they appear to the mind of the intelligent and honest enquirer to be founded upon the unbiaſſed dictates of reason, and the ſacred declarations of the word of God.

In the various claſſes of Miniſters, Elders, Preachers, Profeſſors, Schoolmaſters, and others, who are bound by law to ſubſcribe the Confession of Faith, it is fair to ſuppoſe, that a great number of each claſs believe all the doctrines of that Confession; and not only all the doctrines, but alſo the precise and pointed application of all the Scripture texts which the compilers

compilers of that Confession have produced, to prove the respective doctrines to which they are applied; and may therefore be presumed to subscribe the National Creed, not only without any scruple, diffidence, or hesitation, but with as perfect a conviction, and as full an approbation of their own minds, as a mathematician would subscribe the axioms of Archimedes, or the postulata of Euclid.

It is at the same time, perhaps, not improbable, that in an age of learning and of liberty, which never fails to breed and to nourish diversity of opinions, there may be some, in one or other of the classes above-mentioned, who subscribe the Confession of Faith of this Church, not without some small scruples—either with respect to the full meaning and extent of some of its articles, or at least with respect to the natural and original application of some of those texts which are brought from

from Scripture to prove the truth of these articles. It is possible to conceive, that there may be men who believe the doctrine of infant baptism as a doctrine founded upon reason, justice, religion, and society, who yet may be unable to discover how far that expression of our Saviour, Mark x. *ver.* 14th, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of GOD"—or how far that other expression of our Saviour, Mark xvi. *ver.* 15th and 16th, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned"—can be regarded as either applicable to, or a proof of the doctrine of infant baptism.

It is, therefore, for the relief of tender consciences—for the relief of those, who, though they are, in general, attached to the

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the constitution of the Church of Scotland, to the Presbyterian form of ecclesiastical government established in it, and to the simplicity of its worship and ordinances—yet, from that sensibility of spirit which is inseparable from candour and integrity, may not, as I have said, be without some small scruples as to the import of certain articles in the Confession of Faith, or, at least, as to the application of certain Scripture passages, which are produced as proofs of the truth of these articles, that the present treatise is humbly intended.—But, if it shall in no degree answer the end for which it is designed, I shall at least solace myself in the most perfect consciousness, that the observations which I submit to the Public, arise from no other source than the love of truth, and a sincere regard to the interests of religion and society.

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In reasoning upon the subject, I will lay down this general observation, to which I request the attention of the reader. The observation is—That in subscribing the Confession of Faith, the subscriber is understood to subscribe it, as far as his understanding enables him, in the very sense in which the Confession itself directs him. The reason upon which I found this observation is this—Were any man—Minister, Elder, Preacher, Professor, Schoolmaster, or other, to subscribe it in any other sense than that in which it directs him to subscribe it, or to believe it in any other sense than that in which it directs him to believe it—it is evident, that it is not the Confession of Faith of the Church of Scotland which he either subscribes or believes, but a Confession of Faith bearing another sense, and breathing another spirit.

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The basis, then, upon which I raise the superstructure of the following argument is—that every man who subscribes the Confession of Faith, is supposed to subscribe it in the very sense in which it directs him, and according to those positive maxims which it lays down as the ground-work of its whole contexture. Now, let Reason consider in what sense the Confession of Faith of this Church requires that it be believed and subscribed; and let Candour draw the conclusion.

Did the Confession of Faith of this Church say that its doctrines were infallible, and that they were a perfect and complete interpretation of the Holy Scriptures;—did it say that it is free from every possibility of ignorance, of error, or mistake;—did it say that it was an unerring guide in matters of salvation, and impose itself, as such, upon the conscience of the shackled subscriber;—I do not see

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how any honest man, who is a member of a Protestant Church, could subscribe such a presumptuous and cramping Confession : Because by such subscription, it is plain, he would publicly declare himself a follower of the Westminster Divines, and not a follower of JESUS CHRIST. But, it is the glory of the Westminster Divines—it is the glory of the Church of Scotland—and it is the glory of the Confession of Faith, that there exists in it no evidence of such an arbitrary, self-sufficient, and imposing spirit ;—but that principles directly opposite to these—principles of the most rational and liberal complexion, are there laid down, and, with the full evidence of truth, present themselves to the mind of the unprejudiced and unfettered subscriber.

The Confession of Faith is so far from saying, that it is an infallible interpreter of the Holy Scriptures—that it says something

thing which seems to be the very reverse
 —It declares, that no human system is
 an infallible interpreter of Scripture—
 It declares, that Scripture is the only in-
 fallible interpreter of itself; and that, in
 every doubt or difficulty with regard to
 any doctrine of religion, or any mode of
 religious worship, an appeal is to be made
 —not to the Confession of Faith—not to
 any system of religious opinions drawn
 up, or compiled by sinful and fallible
 men—but to the Holy Scriptures, which
 derive their existence, their establishment,
 and their authority, from the immediate
 inspiration and power of GOD. The Con-
 fession of Faith is so far from saying, that
 it is entirely free from every degree of
 ignorance, error, or mistake—that it says
 something which seems to lead to a con-
 trary conclusion—It declares, that every
 creed, or system of religious opinions,
 composed by men, to which species of

composition itself belongs, is liable to error, and to mixture. The Confession of Faith is so far from saying, that it is an unerring guide to salvation—or from imposing itself, as such, upon the conscience of the subscriber—that it says something which seems to lead the unbiassed mind to an opposite conviction—It declares, that all doctrines of men, and decrees of councils, since the days of CHRIST and the Apostles, are, and have been, liable to error, and corruption—Therefore, the injunction which it gives is this—that all such doctrines and decrees are not to be received as guides in matters of salvation, but only to be used as helps to lead the mind to the Holy Scriptures—which, it declares, are the only true and infallible guide in all those things which relate to the principles of faith, and the precepts of morality.

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In these observations which I have made upon the sense and spirit of the Confession of Faith of the Church of Scotland, I have not spoken from conjecture, or even from deduction,—but from the plain and unambiguous expressions—the positive and incontrovertible declarations, of the Confession of Faith itself. And, for the more complete satisfaction of the serious and candid reader, I beg leave to lay before him, at full length, the passages upon which these observations are founded—that he may, impartially and conscientiously, judge for himself.—

The first passage to which I allude, is in the first chapter of the Confession of Faith, sections 8th, 9th, and 10th. Sect. 8th—

“ The Old Testament in Hebrew, and
 “ the New Testament in Greek, being
 “ immediately inspired by God, and, by
 “ his singular care and providence, kept
 “ pure in all ages, are therefore authen-
 “ tical,

“ tical, so as, in all controversies of reli-
 “ gion, the Church is finally to appeal
 “ to them.”——Sect. 9th—“ The infal-
 “ lible rule of interpretation of Scripture,
 “ is the Scripture itself; and therefore,
 “ when there is a question about the
 “ true and full sense of any Scripture,
 “ which is not manifold, but one, it must
 “ be searched and known by other places
 “ that speak more clearly.”——Sect 10th--
 “ The Supreme Judge by which all con-
 “ troversies of religion are to be deter-
 “ mined, and all decrees of councils,
 “ opinions of ancient writers, doctrines
 “ of men, and private spirits, are to be
 “ examined, and in whose sentence we
 “ are to rest, can be no other than the
 “ Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.”

Upon these three sections, I wish to
 make the following observations, and to
 submit them to the cool consideration of
 the unprejudiced and intelligent reader.
 The *first* point which these sections esta-
 blish,

blish, is—That “ the Scripture is the only
“ infallible interpreter of Scripture :”—

And the reason which it assigns for this,
is—that “ the Scripture only is derived
“ from the immediate inspiration of God.”

The *second* point which these sections establish, is—That “ the Scripture is the Supreme Judge ” to which, in every controversy, or disputed doctrine in religion, an appeal is to be made, and in whose infallible determination we are, solely and finally, to rest.—From the admission of these two points, the two following conclusions will manifestly arise. In the *first* place—If it be true that the Scripture is the only infallible interpreter of Scripture, as the Westminster Divines, and the Commissioners of the Church of Scotland, have positively asserted—then it must be true, that the Confession of Faith, or any other system of religious doctrines whatever, composed or compiled by fallible men,

men, is not to be regarded as an infallible interpretation of Scripture—because, to maintain this, would be flatly to contradict the positive assertion of the Westminster Divines—Hence, in the sense of these Divines, the Confession of Faith is to be considered as a work, like every other human work, liable to imperfection, and to fallibility.—In the *second* place—If it be true, that the Scripture is “the Supreme Judge” by which all religious disputes are to be determined, as the Westminster Divines have also positively asserted—then it must be true, the Confession of Faith, or any other system of religious opinions, composed or compiled by men, is not to be regarded as the Supreme Judge, in whose sentences we are finally to rest—but only as a subordinate and inferior judge, from whose decisions, in every point of controversy, there lies an appeal to the Holy Scriptures.

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The question, then, is—Whether does he who believes and subscribes the Confession of Faith—as a fallible, or as an infallible interpreter of Scripture—as a supreme, or as a subordinate judge in matters of religion—believe and subscribe it in the sense prescribed by the Westminster Divines, and the Commissioners of the Church of Scotland?—To this question, I leave every man's conscience in the sight of God to reply.

The *second* passage to which I allude, is in the 25th chapter of the Confession of Faith, section 5th: “The purest Churches “under heaven are subject both to mixture “and error.” The conclusion which I draw from this proposition is this—Were it true that the Church of Scotland, including its doctrines, discipline and worship, were at this moment the purest and most perfect Church upon the face of the earth—yet still it would be true, according to the

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positive declaration of the Confession of Faith, that it would be “ subject both “ to mixture and error.”

The question, then, is—Whether does he who believes and subscribes the Confession of Faith, as a system totally exempt from every degree of error, and of imperfection; or he who believes and subscribes it as a system which in some degree may be liable to mixture or mistake—believe and subscribe it in the sense prescribed by the Westminster Divines, and the Commissioners of the Church of Scotland?—This question I leave every man to answer according to the convictions of his own mind.

The *third* passage to which I allude, is in the 31st chapter of the Confession of Faith, section 4th—“ All Synods and “ Councils since the Apostles times, whether general or particular, may err, and “ many have erred;—therefore they are “ not

“ not to be made the rule of faith or
 “ practice—but to be used as an help in
 “ both.” The important doctrine which
 this section establishes, is—That all Syn-
 nods and Councils, since the days of the
 Apostles, may err ; and of consequence,
 that all confessions, creeds, systems and
 opinions framed by such “ Synods and
 “ Councils, whether general or particu-
 “ lar,” may be erroneous. And the li-
 beral conclusion which it draws from that
 doctrine is—That such systems, creeds,
 and doctrines, being thus liable to error,
 “ are not to be made the rule of faith
 “ and practice—but to be used only as an
 “ help in both.”

The question, then, is—Whether does
 he who believes and subscribes the Con-
 fession of Faith as an unerring guide in
 faith and practice ? Or he who believes and
 subscribes it only as an useful help in
 both—believe and subscribe it most agree-

ably to the sense fixed upon it by the Westminster Divines, and the Commissioners of the Church of Scotland?—This question I leave to the decision of common honesty, and common sense.

Thus have I endeavoured to prove, that the Confession of Faith of the Church of Scotland, does not subvert liberty of conscience, or freedom of enquiry—that it does not hold itself up as an infallible interpreter of Scripture, or as a supreme judge in religious controversy—that it does not arrogate an exemption from every mixture of error or ignorance, or set itself up as a guide in faith or practice—but that, conscious of its being liable to ignorance and imperfection, and that, like every other human system, it may be mixed with some degree of error and mistake, it guards against every sentiment of arrogance and presumption, and, with a becoming humility, offers
itself

itself only as a help to assist the human mind in its researches after truth. And if these propositions be admitted, which I think no person, who without prejudice and prepossession has read the Confession of Faith, will deny; then the conclusion which I propose to draw from them, will, I should apprehend, be equally clear and indisputable,—which is,—That any person who is in general well affected to the constitution of the Church of Scotland—to the presbyterian form of ecclesiastical government established in it—and to the simplicity of its worship and ordinances—although he may have some small scruples with regard to the import of some of its doctrines, or at least to the application of some of the texts which are brought from Scripture to prove their truth—and who regards the Confession of Faith as an important help in faith and practice—although he cannot receive it

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as an infallible interpreter — a supreme judge—or an unerring guide,—may fairly and honestly subscribe the Confession of Faith — nay, be said to subscribe it according to the very principles which it inculcates, and in the very sense in which it directs the subscriber to understand and to believe it.

Upon the whole—Whatever opinions the enemies of our Church may form of the Confession of Faith which it prescribes to its members —— or whatever scruples some of its friends may entertain with regard to any of its particular doctrines, proofs, or interpretations ——yet, from the passages which I have quoted, and the remarks which I have made upon them, it is obvious to every impartial mind, that, considered in general, it is a system of religious liberty;—that it leaves conscience free from the doctrines and

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commandments of men ; in every point of controversy, makes its appeal to Scripture ; and teaches every man to regard the Scripture, as the only infallible interpreter of the mind of God.

The conviction of that liberty, which, not only as a Nation, but as a Church, we enjoy, ought to inspire us with the most devout sentiments of gratitude to Almighty God for the inestimable advantages which we derive from the glorious Reformation, and which were settled and confirmed to us by the glorious Revolution ;——infomuch that, not only under the sacred influence of Divine authority, but also under the fostering wing of civil protection, we eat the fruit of our own labours without molestation, and, in public assemblies, worship the God of our fathers, without the dread of having our blood mingled with our sacrifices.

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The conviction of that liberty, which, not only as a Nation, but as a Church, we enjoy, ought to check in us every intolerant and persecuting disposition; and should lead us to sympathize with the mental, as well as with the corporeal infirmities of our brethren. It becomes us to consider, that the same truth may appear in different lights to different minds, according to the different degrees of their original capacity, the different modes of their respective education, and the different kinds of company with which they are accustomed to associate. Nay, it becomes us to consider, that the same truth may appear in different lights to the same mind, in proportion as the clouds of ignorance are removed, and the understanding is illuminated with the beams of knowledge, and displays the gradual openings of progressive improvement. Let Protestants, then, guard against rash judgment,

ment, uncharitable censure, and presumptuous condemnation of their fellow-creatures—and let them regulate their conduct by that charity which thinketh no evil, speaketh no evil, and doeth no evil—but which believeth all things, hopeth all things, and performeth all things—that amidst the variety of human opinions, they may preserve the harmony of Christian affection, and, amidst the diversity of religious persuasions, may keep inviolate “the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”

The conviction of that liberty, which, not only as a Nation, but as a Church, we enjoy, ought to excite our anxiety to improve our happy situation, and animate our ambition to aspire after glory and perfection, by studying principles of useful knowledge, and by displaying lives of exemplary virtue—whilst, with a watchful circumspection, and a prudent zeal, we

labour to transmit, pure and inviolate to
our posterity, those sacred and inestimable
blessings, which we have derived from
the virtue, the valour, and the blood of
our ancestors.

" We envy not the warmer clime that lies
" In ten degrees of more indulgent skies ;
" 'Tis Liberty that crowns Britannia's isle,
" And makes her barren rocks and her bleak moun-
" tains smile."

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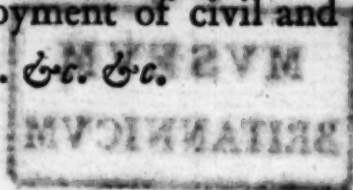
SOME persons consider the Confession of Faith of the Church of Scotland to be as great an encroachment upon liberty as the Test-act of England—But this is evidently a gross mistake. The Confession of Faith, as I have shown in the foregoing treatise, though it were admitted to have some defects, as no human system, perhaps, is absolutely perfect, yet, upon the whole, considered as a system, is a system of liberty—inasmuch as it leaves conscience free from the commandments of men, and makes its appeal to Reason and Scripture. The Test-act, on the contrary,

trary, by obliging every civil officer under the Crown to take the sacrament according to the forms of the Church of England, is destructive of liberty—inasmuch as it makes the civil rights of subjects, however well affected to the King, laws, government, and constitution of the State, depend upon a compliance with certain religious institutions, with which the civil rights of mankind have no natural or immediate connexion.

The Confession of Faith is a religious test only for those who are public rulers and office-bearers in the religious and ecclesiastical part of the establishment: The Test-act is a religious test for those who belong not, in a public capacity, to the ecclesiastical establishment—but who are rulers and office-bearers in the civil department.

The Confession of Faith converts no institution of Christ into an engine of worldly

worldly policy: The Test-act is a shameful prostitution of the holy sacrament of our Lord's Supper, by making that solemn ordinance, which was, not only primarily, but solely, intended to be a commemoration of the sufferings and death of JESUS CHRIST, a tool of temporal ambition, and a qualification for the possession and enjoyment of civil and military offices, &c. &c. &c.



F I N I S.

worldly policy: The Test is a means
of preservation of the holy sacrament of
our Lord's Supper, by marking that so-
lemn ordinance, which was not only pre-
served, but solely, intended to be a com-
memoration of the sufferings and death
of Jesus Christ, a tool of temporal ambi-
tion, and a qualification for the possession
of civil and military offices.

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